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NEW ENGLAND'S LOST LEADERSHIP

BY MRS. FLORENCE KELLEY,
Secretary of the National Consumers' League.

What is New England going to do about child labor now? We have been talking about the laws for five years. We have been talking of the field that stretches before us, but the question that haunts my mind all the time is, Why does New England hold us all back? Why does it continue persistently to hold us all back? Why is it true now in 1910 that not one New England state gives to its children the blessings of the eight-hour day? Dr. Adler told us that during the last few years ten states have established for their children the eight-hour day. Why is there no New England state in that honor list of ten? All told, there are sixteen states which give their children the eight-hour day. Part of them did not enact it directly as a child labor measure. Part of these sixteen states are western mining states, where the workingmen have used their ballots to establish the eight-hour day for all who are employed in mines or smelters or at the mine's mouth, and, incidentally, in legislating for the industry, they have legislated for the only children who would be working in those states, because they are pre-eminently mining states. Why is New England unable to point to one state in that honor list of sixteen states?

Why is New England willing to let her children go out from school with less education than the City of New York requires for every immigrant child who comes to our port? It is true, I believe—I hope I may be corrected if I am in error—that after the law has been twice amended it is still legal for a boy or girl in Boston, fourteen years old, to leave school when he or she knows enough English to enter the fourth grade of the public schools, and go to work. If I am right in that, why are the children of Boston given two years less required education than the children of the city of Rochester, New York, which has only just come into the same class with Boston, only now become a city of the first class? Even in our metropolis, where we have so many children, unhappily, on half

time, because the expenditure of six or ten million dollars a year is never enough to build schools for all the children who come in on the ships, and pour in on the trains; even there, we do not let the children go out of school and into the factory until they have finished four and one-half years of school work and are in the second half of the fifth year.

Why can the children of Boston go to work when they finish the work of three years of the public schools? It is not fair to employers in the competing states; it presses unfairly on them if their laws are more rigid. It is not fair to the manufacturers of New York that Massachusetts should so hold back. It is certainly not fair to the children of Massachusetts. Why is it still legal for messenger boys to work here at night so young as they can still work here? I do not see why we busy ourselves so much with what is happening below Washington or west of Ohio when we come to Massachusetts. What I want to know is, Why are the hearts of New England so hard toward the children of New England? Why do not New England people love their children enough to give them the short working day and the long term of school?

Some few years ago the governor of Tennessee called a conference at Nashville of representatives of the cotton industries, of the cotton states, and the governors of those states. The new young factory inspector of Louisiana, occupant of a newly-created position, Miss Jean Gordon, came to that conference full of knowledge of the needs of the children of New Orleans, of their urgent need in that torrid climate of a shorter working day. She introduced a resolution in the conference that all the Southern states should agree to take as their goal the eight-hour day for their children. The matter was discussed two days, and then the conference voted that so long as Pennsylvania let young children work twelve hours a day, and Massachusetts let them work ten hours, the South could not be expected to take a flying leap and arrive at the eight-hour day while the North held back.

How long is New England going to hold the rest of us back?